

[AZ Capitol Times](#)

By Jeremy Duda

The five Democrats and three Republicans in Arizona's congressional delegation displayed a rare unified front in their request to have five new federal judge positions created to combat border-related crime in the state.

The eight representatives signed a letter July 23 addressed to Sen. Patrick Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who chairs the committee, and Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, the committee's ranking Republican. The letter asks the senators to reject the advice of the U.S. Judicial Conference, which advised the committee to add just one permanent and one temporary U.S. District Court judge in Arizona.

"We were disappointed by the conference's recommendation that the Arizona District add only one permanent judge and one temporary judge. Given the district's increasing caseload resulting from illegal immigration, drug trafficking and other related crimes, we urge you to reject the conference's recommendation," read the letter from Reps. Jeff Flake, Trent Franks, Gabrielle Giffords, Raul Grijalva, Ann Kirkpatrick, Harry Mitchell, Ed Pastor and John Shadegg.

The Judicial Conference recommended in 2005 and 2007 that five new judges be added in Arizona, which would bring the number of federal judges in the state to 18. The trends in 2009 fully support that recommendation, according to the letter.

In the first three months of 2009, felony case filings in the U.S. District Court for Arizona rose by 37.8 percent compared to the same period in 2008, the representatives wrote. In the first half of 2009, more than 112,000 alleged illegal immigrants were apprehended in the Customs and Border Patrol's Tucson sector, a sum that represents about 44 percent of all illegal immigrants arrested along the U.S.-Mexican border during that period.

The 900,000 lbs. of marijuana seized in the Tucson sector in 2008 represents about half of all marijuana seized along the Mexican border that year, they wrote. And the 596,900 lbs. seized in the sector in the first half of this year represents an increase of 34 percent from the same period in 2008.

"It is clear that the U.S. Judicial Conference's recommendations were based on data that fails to reflect the caseload increases that we are already witnessing in Arizona. We feel strongly that five additional federal judges, as recommended by the conference in 2007, are fully warranted and greatly needed," the eight representatives wrote.